

UNDER WAITING ORDERS

By JAMES GREE

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Jack Randolph sat on the piazza and read over the telegram again. Already the paper was cracking on the creases from frequent foldings and unfoldings. Randolph could have read it from memory. "Go to Old Point Comfort," it read, "and wait orders."

He had been waiting orders for four days now, and repeated telegrams to the office had simply brought forth repetitions of those instructions.

Randolph was sick of it all. Ever since he had refused point blank to consider the question of a marriage to some girl his father had picked out for him he had been exiled to the road as special salesman and had been jumped from east to west on the most absurd propositions.

There might be a man coming to Old Point who wanted to buy a suspension bridge, but Randolph could not see why he had not been sent to the office of the firm instead of being shipped to Old Point. Not that he objected to a week at the famous resort with nothing to do, but the uncertainty of it all was irritating. He decided to send another telegram and headed for the telegraph office.

He never got there, for just as he swung around a corner of the piazza the prettiest girl he had ever seen ran into him as she dashed along the piazza. By the time mutual apologies were concluded Jack had forgotten all about the telegram and had come to the conclusion that he was satisfied to stay at the Point as long as the office decided he was needed there.

Instead of going into the office he volunteered his services as guide to Marjorie Carson, who had arrived the night before, and it was well along in the afternoon before he even thought of the despised telegram.

He met Mrs. Carson on their return and that evening he changed his seat to their table and was installed as their guide and counselor. More than ever



HE HAD THROWN AN ARM ABOUT HER.

was he glad that he had refused to accept his father's dictum and marry some one else. Of course it would make an awful row when he wrote that he was going to marry Marjorie, but he had gained some recognition as an engineer, and it would not be hard to make his way if only Marjorie would accept him.

Marjorie's frank friendliness was scarcely encouraging to his hopes, but as the days progressed he gained in her favor, and before the end of his first week he had begun to flatter himself that he was making headway.

Mrs. Carson clearly approved of him. Early in the acquaintance he had taken pains to acquaint her with his history in an impersonal sort of way that did not sound like a formal announcement, and she had smiled and replied that she had heard of his father. After that she had been much in the background, and the young people went boating and on other excursions alone.

It was well along in the third week before he had ventured to speak of love to the girl. It was as they were coming home one evening, and in saving herself from a fall as she stepped on a loose stone, she had caught at his coat sleeve. He had thrown an arm about her and had kept it there until with a rosy face she had disengaged herself.

"I can get along all right now," she said, as she stepped ahead. He laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"I hope you can't," he said, simply. "I should like you to think that you always needed me."

"I don't," was the savage answer. "I don't ever need you, and I wish you would go away."

"Pardon," he said quietly. "I had no wish to be offensive."

They went along in silence, but as they parted at the foot of the piazza steps she turned toward him and held out her hand.

"I am afraid I was very rude," she said simply. "Will you forgive me?"

"If you will take back what you said," he answered pleadingly.

"I think you're horrid," she exclaimed with a sudden shift from her penitential mood. "If you were a gentle

demand an explanation, and left behind her a much puzzled swain.

He was too tactful to reopen the question that evening, but for half the night he paced the floor after he had gone to his room and vainly sought for an explanation of her odd remark.

That she liked him was apparent. He could not see wherein he had been offensive, and yet she had spoken as if he must understand what the matter was.

He was still puzzled the next morning when they met at breakfast, but there was no opportunity for an explanation until late that evening. Just before the party broke up Jack and Marjorie were standing on the piazza. The others had moved toward the entrance and had left them alone in the corner.

"What did you mean yesterday?" he asked. "I was not conscious of giving offense."

"I should think it would bore you as much as it does me," she answered, "but I don't want to talk about it, so good night."

She sped down the piazza. He turned half irresolutely, then with a sigh he turned back and went down the other side.

That night he walked the floor again, but no solution came to him, and at last he threw himself upon the bed and slept a sleep in which Marjorie perpetually danced before him, ever eluding his grasp and yet ever entreating him. Some intangible barrier seemed to be separating them, and he had the uncomfortable feeling that if he could determine the nature of this barrier he would gain her hand.

So strong was this impression that immediately after breakfast he sought Marjorie on the piazza.

"You've been mystifying me long enough," he said abruptly. "I want to know what it all means."

"As if you didn't," she said scornfully. "I've caught you and mother laughing over it lots of times."

"I assure you that I do not know what you mean," he said.

"Just as if you were not down here by your father's orders," she scoffed. "I saw it all the moment mother said you were here."

Randolph gasped. "You don't mean to say that you are the girl father wants me to marry?" he cried.

"Why, of course," she retorted. "Just as if you didn't know."

"I didn't," he replied promptly. "The moment the pater said marriage I balked and did not even learn the name of the girl."

"Then why are you here?" she demanded. "You know it was all a pre-arranged plan."

For answer he pulled out the telegram. "I thought it was some one who wanted to buy a bridge," he explained. "Had I supposed otherwise I should never have come."

"Are you sorry you did?" she asked teasingly.

"Not if you say yes," he answered promptly.

"Since you are not acting under orders and just loved me"—she began. The sentence was not finished; there was no need.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Carson found them in front of the telegraph desk. Jack held a telegram in his hand. It read:

"Special business concluded. Think I shall stay on. Think I have done very well in default of more definite instructions."

Premature Rejoicing.

"You tell me that I am 'it' with her?"

"Not a doubt of it."

"You don't know how glad you make me feel. How do you know?"

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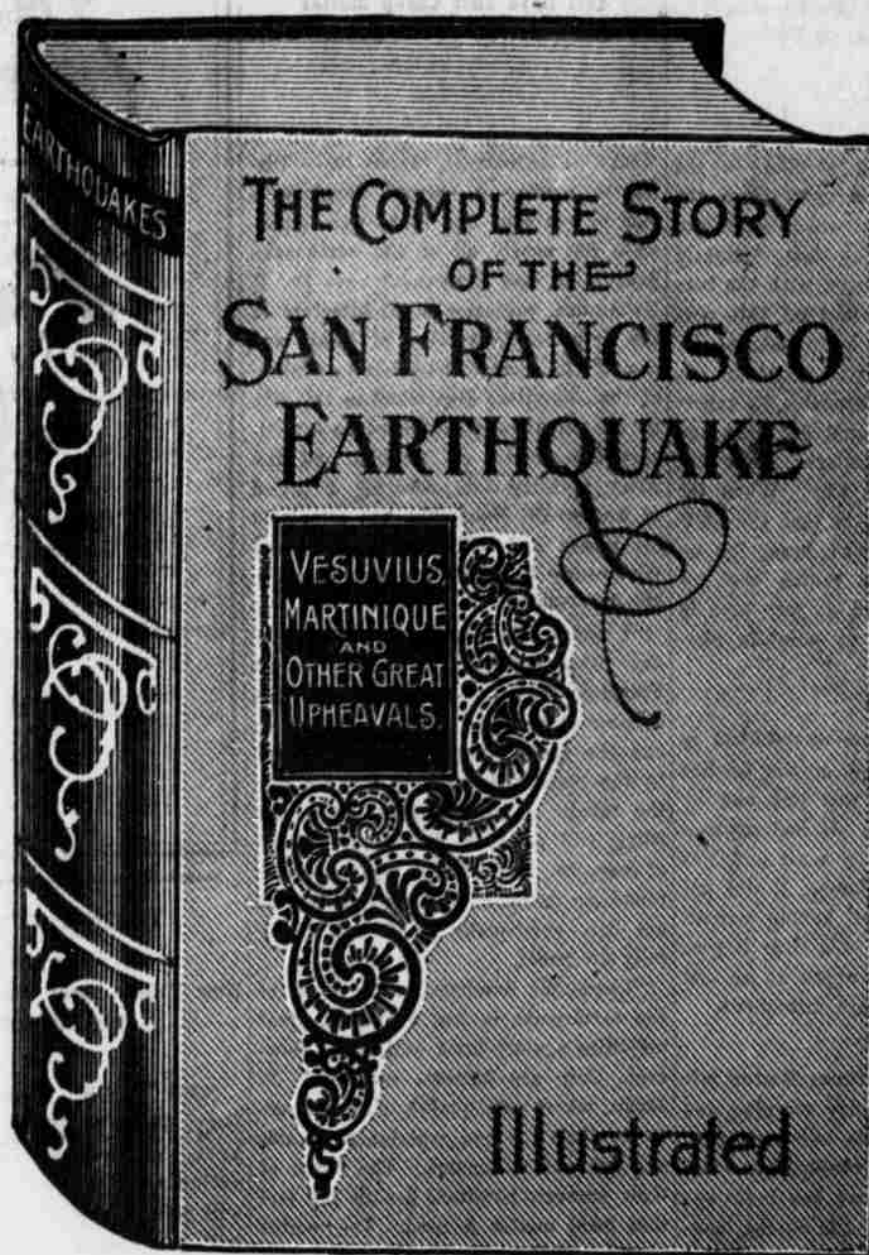
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